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# How Dumbledore Saved Europe: A Comparison of Fascist Rhetoric in European History and in the Harry Potter Franchises

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How Dumbledore Saved Europe:

A Comparison of Fascist Rhetoric in European History and in the Harry Potter Franchises

Emma Pederson & Natalie Rice

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Fascism is one of the most influential ideologies to come out of the 20th century. This philosophy has guided governments, armed conflicts, and literature. Drawing on the Harry Potter franchises, it is clear that fascist ideas have pervaded modern literature, even children's literature. A series of young adult fantasy novels and films, the Harry Potter franchise is loved by people of all ages and nationalities. These stories draw on real-life themes to create some realistic elements in an otherwise fantastic, magical world. Fascism is one such theme.

Parallels are often drawn between Voldemort, villain of the original Harry Potter series, and Hitler or other fascist leaders, but Grindelwald, villain of the new Fantastic Beasts franchise, has a more direct connection. If Grindelwald is a Nazi, Voldemort is a neo-Nazi, bringing back fascist ideas from the early twentieth century and trying to implement them in the 1990s. Grindelwald's story takes place in the 1920s to 1940s, beginning with his fascist roots as a young man alongside Albus Dumbledore, and following his rise to power in mainland Europe, setting the same goals and using the same rhetoric and strategies as real-life French and German fascists in the same time period.

These two characters - Grindelwald and Dumbledore - successfully depict the historical roots of fascism in Germany and France, respectively. Grindelwald is better compared to German fascist movements taken as a whole, rather than to one specific individual. He is fascism personified. All the information the reader has regarding him, even his childhood, points to his ultimate goal of magical domination. He has no notable significance other than to cause conflict, and no motivation other than achieving power over Muggles, or non-Wizards. With the goal of control over Muggles, his intentions match that of fascists who wanted to place themselves

above other, less “pure” ethnic groups. In seeking to achieve this goal, both Grindelwald and the real-life fascists he represents utilize similar tactics.

Albus Dumbledore, on the other hand, represents French fascist movements as a whole. As a character, he was originally assumed to be entirely anti-fascist. It was not until the final book in the original Harry Potter series, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, that Dumbledore was outed by infamous reporter Rita Skeeter to have had extreme fascist roots with Grindelwald in his youth. This is similar to French fascism. France is often historically mistaken to have been entirely anti-German and anti-fascism during World War II due to its support of Britain and the United States. Upon closer inspection, it is clear that France also held strong nationalistic sentiments before the war.

Although fascism spread across Europe in the 20th century, we have chosen only to remark on French and German fascism because they draw distinct parallels to the characters in the Harry Potter franchises. Though the series takes place in England, it is French fascism and France’s immunity thesis that directly correlates to Albus Dumbledore and German fascism to Gellert Grindelwald. In addition, the fascism of Britain in the interwar period was opposed by the English people and government to a much larger extent than both French and German fascism. It never rose to the same prominence there, just as Grindelwald never became powerful in England.

### **Grindelwald and Dumbledore as Fascism Embodied**

In this paper, we will analyse J.K. Rowling’s use of fascism by comparing French and German history to the events in the Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts franchises. We will start by

defining fascism and giving a brief summary of the Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts franchises. Then we will move onto French fascism, by explaining the roots of fascism in the Dreyfus affair and how that lead to a French-first anti-semitic fascism at the turn of the 20th century. We will give details of two French writers, Maurice Barrès and Charles Péguy, and their political philosophies and literary works to link them to an understanding of Albus Dumbledore's fascist sentiments in his youth. We will then outline the French immunity thesis and compare this to the view of Dumbledore in the Wizarding world until his death in 1996.

Next, we will delve into German fascism and the methods Nazis used to gain power, which parallels Grindelwald's rise. We will consider primary quotes from both Nazi figures and Grindelwald to recognize similarities in ideologies and language. In some ways, Grindelwald corresponds to Hitler, but the better comparison is between Grindelwald and the Nazi fascists as a whole. Both heavily relied on mythologies, symbolism, and rhetoric to gain and sustain support, manipulating followers by preying on their emotional responses. We will link these strategies to show how real-world events are recognizable in this modern literature. Additionally, we will address the differences that arise when viewing Grindelwald as an individual and the Nazi Party as an institution.

### **The Story of Fascism**

Fascism is a philosophy or movement that originated in late 19th- and early 20th-century Europe. It is characterized by radical nationalism, often under a dictatorial regime, which forcefully suppresses opposition. This radical nationalism creates an "us-versus-them" mentality between different groups of people, which is often based on characteristics such as religion and

race. In the 20th century, fascism was the primary political philosophy underlying French writers, such as Maurice Barrès and Charles Péguy, as well as Adolf Hitler and Nazis in World War II Germany.

Fascism rose to prominence in the aftermath of the First World War and led directly to the Second World War. It was closely connected to other movements, including the National Socialist Party's takeover of the German government. Nazism as an ideology that incorporates but is not limited to fascism. The Nazis clung to fascist ideas of racial purity and dictatorship, but in a way that was specifically German. Meanwhile, fascism also gained prominence in many other European nations. Although not a direct part of the Axis Powers of World War II, France held similar this fascist ideology all the same. It existed primarily in the works of famous political philosophers and writers, rather than taking a stronghold in the government the way it did in Germany.

### **The Harry Potter Books and Films**

In 1997, J.K. Rowling published the first book in one of the bestselling series of all time: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. The popularity of this book spawned six sequels, eight movies, a spin-off theater production, and a spin-off movie franchise. Undoubtedly, the Harry Potter series has shaped the minds and hearts of a generation. This story of a boy Wizard contains lessons on morality, good and evil, friendship, love, and of course, fascism.

On his eleventh birthday in 1991, Harry Potter is thrown into the Wizarding world, an entire community of Witches and Wizards unknown to the Muggles. He attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where he not only learns how to do magic but he also

discovers he is the legendary Boy Who Lived. As a child, he survived an attack by Voldemort, an evil Wizard who sought power in England. He and his supporters, largely Purebloods (Wizards of pure Wizarding lineage) discriminated against Half-Bloods and Muggle-Borns (derogatorily known as Mudbloods).

The next six books detail Harry's journey as he grows up, while the dark Wizard who killed his parents regains power and wages war. With the help of friends Ron and Hermione and mentor Dumbledore, Harry reveals Voldemort split his soul into seven pieces called Horcruxes. On his quest, Harry uses three magical tools - the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak - collectively known as the Deathly Hallows. By united these folkloric items, Harry becomes Master of Death. Once he destroys the Horcruxes, Harry faces off against Voldemort in a final duel, in which good triumphs over evil.

Five years after the release of the final Harry Potter movie, fans received a new addition to the Wizarding world canon: the Fantastic Beasts franchise. Detailing the adventures of Newt Scamander, the Fantastic Beasts franchise is a prequel to the Harry Potter stories. Scamander, author of one of Harry's textbooks, is only briefly mentioned in the original series. Though known as a magizoologist,<sup>1</sup> Scamander's story is not limited to his relationship with magical creatures. Instead, his story is placed in the context of the First Wizarding War. The series begins in the 1920s and will culminate in Grindelwald's defeat in 1945, a timeline which matches the historical rise and fall of fascism in Europe. From the original Harry Potter series, viewers know the war will end in a duel between Dark Wizard Gellert Grindelwald and Harry's future

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<sup>1</sup> A Wizard who studies magical creatures; Scamander pioneered the field.

instructor Albus Dumbledore, but since only two out of five movies in the series have been released, much of the story remains a mystery.

As of 2018, the first two films have been released: *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* and *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*. The first describes Scamander's trip to New York, which ends with the unmasking of the wanted criminal Gellert Grindelwald. The second film focuses more heavily on Grindelwald's character as he escapes from prison and gathers support in Paris. The film ends with Grindelwald evading capture once again as he and his supporters go out into the world to spread his message. The final three installments of the series will span the following decades as Grindelwald achieves greater power and is ultimately defeated. As noted in the original series, Dumbledore's ultimate defeat over Grindelwald occurs in 1945, the same year as Allies defeat over the Axis powers. This growth of fascist power and the First Wizarding War can be understood as a direct parallel to the growth of fascist European powers and World War II.

### **An Analysis of French Fascism in Relation to Albus Dumbledore**

In the early 20th century growth of fascism, France certainly played a role. Despite its reputation as a victim of fascism, it was in many ways a perpetrator as well. In the second film of the *Fantastic Beasts* franchise, Grindelwald travels to Paris knowing he can find supporters who already hold his anti-Muggle, or *Les Non-Magiques*, sentiments there. Here, in the heart of France, the Grindelwald's Wizarding fascist movement begins to take root.

Although by 1926, Dumbledore is publicly anti-Grindelwald, that had not always been the case. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the release of Rita Skeeter's book, *The Life*



and *Lies of Albus Dumbledore*, after Dumbledore's death revealed his true fascist past.<sup>2</sup> This shocked Harry Potter, who had only known of Dumbledore's part in the opposition of Grindelwald's and Voldemort's fascism. Similarly, French fascism had been claimed by French scholars in the years following World War II to be an entirely foreign concept, forced upon them by other European powers.

### Roots of French Fascism

The roots of French fascism were planted years before World War II. The first prominent appearance of these sentiments in popular society bloomed alongside outward anti-semitism during the Dreyfus affair. In 1894, a Jewish army officer named Alfred Dreyfus was accused of giving confidential military information to the Germans and thus, terminated from the military.<sup>3</sup> This event - along with its widespread media attention from the new mass press - created a great polarization among the French. On one side, there were the Dreyfusards, who supported Dreyfus and maintained his innocence. On the other were the Anti-Dreyfusards. Out of this polarization and a growing movement for a more patriotic nationalism, fascist organizations like Charles Maurras' *l'Action Française* were born.<sup>4</sup>

This nationalist right held, at the beginning of the 20th century, that their love of France and their desire for a better nation, and thus a better world, created a justification for a fascist France-above-all sentiment. Eugen Weber writes in his work, *Action Française: Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth-Century France*, that fascist men were brought together by "an overriding

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<sup>2</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 355-7.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Jones, *Cambridge Illustrated History of France*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 235.

<sup>4</sup> Eugen Weber, *Action française : Royalism and Reaction in Twentieth Century France*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1962), 18.

love of France, a great respect for order, and father in the orderly processes of reason...they set out to prepare the way for its [nationalism's] return by education people to see things their way.”

<sup>5</sup> “Their way,” was the view that held French people against all others, including Jewish and Protestant people, and those on the side of Dreyfus. Pro-Dreyfus meant Anti-French, and thus those who took this side were working against the true France and must be opposed entirely by them.

This condescension extended to even those French-born who defended Dreyfus. Émile Zola, for example, became a figure of “betrayal” to the French people according French fascist figure Maurice Barrès. In Barrès’ writing, he declares that Zola, although French-born, is a “barbarian” who opposes a threat to the national identity and culture of the true French.<sup>6</sup> In his most famous work, *Les Déracinés*, Barrès states the importance of national identity and defines what “Frenchness” and the “French race” are, along with listing the “enemy” who is able to “pollute” and “corrupt” the proper French collective.<sup>7</sup> All those who do not defend the race are those who pollute it, and Dreyfusards, such as Zola, were among these people.<sup>8</sup>

This us-versus-them mentality is seen in the Harry Potter series as well. In *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, the fascist Ministry of Magic of 1997 releases literature similar to Barrès which tells of “Mudbloods and the Dangers They Pose to a Peaceful Pure-Blood Society.”<sup>9</sup> Their goal with this literature is the same as Barrès’: to propagate one race above another. The Ministry for Magic also treats pure-bloods who oppose them as equally disgraceful.

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<sup>5</sup> Weber, *Action Française*, 26.

<sup>6</sup> David Carroll, *French Literary Fascism: Nationalism, Anti-Semitism, and the Ideology of Culture*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1995), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Carroll, *French Literary Fascism*, 28-30.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 28-30.

<sup>9</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, (New York, Scholastic Inc., 2007), 249.

While in the ministry, Harry sees a governmental file about Arthur Weasley, his friend Ron's dad. Arthur is known throughout the series to be sympathetic to Muggles and mudbloods. In this file, it reads his blood-status as "pureblood, but with unacceptable pro-Muggle leanings" and says that he is being monitored by the government for suspicious activity.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the Ministry, like Barrès, is not only creating a divide between one people and another, but it is saying that to be sympathetic or supportive of the "other" is unacceptable and defiles you all the same, the way that Zola supposedly defiles himself by being a Dreyfusard. Although this is one specific example of a Harry Potter character being targeted by fascist sentiments, it is clear throughout the series that any character who opposed fascist workings in both the Ministry of Magic and fascist organizations themselves were target of similar attacks. This includes Albus Dumbledore, founder and leader of the Order of the Phoenix, an organization which worked against Voldemort in the Second Wizarding War.

### Mythology

*Les Déracinés* is one part of Barrès trilogy of *Le Roman de l'Énergie Nationale*.

Although a fictional story, it professes dangerous fascist sentiments held by Barrès. In one scene, it depicts a dramatic folklorish story in which French students gather and unify around the tomb of Napoléon. There, these young men "recognize each other as brothers. They shake hands. Impassioned cries burst from their lips. Subjugated to the play of such powerful forces, stirred up by their admiration and solidarity, they are ready to accept any authoritative speech."<sup>11</sup> Napoléon

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<sup>10</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 251-2.

<sup>11</sup> Carroll, *French Literary Fascism*, 35.

is their idol. He is a figure who symbolizes what a pro-French France could be and serves to unite them to achieve this nationalistic end.

The sentiments of this story which serve French fascism are the same as the sentiments which guide Dumbledore and Grindelwald in their quest for the Deathly Hallows. *The Tale of the Three Brothers* becomes relevant in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, when the main characters discover Voldemort, inspired by Grindelwald, is seeking the Deathly Hallows. Grindelwald and Dumbledore had been friends in their youth. As clever and adventurous young Wizards, they together sought power and the Deathly Hallows to become the Masters of Death until a falling out over Dumbledore's sister's death. Though Grindelwald's journey is less prominent, Voldemort's is shown to mimic it, allowing the reader to infer Grindelwald's own decisions. In this Wizarding fairy tale, three brothers survive a dangerous river crossing, prompting Death himself to grant them each one wish. The first brother wishes for the most powerful wand in existence, which allows him to win many duels before ultimately being murdered in his sleep and the wand stolen. The second brother wishes to continue to conquer Death and receives a Resurrection Stone; when he brings his lover back from the dead, she is distant and he kills himself to truly be with her. The third brother asks for an Invisibility Cloak, which allows him to hide from Death until he is ready for its peaceful embrace in his old age. To most Wizards, this is nothing more than a children's bedtime story, but to some, it reveals the truth of the Deathly Hallows.<sup>12</sup>

In their journey for the Deathly Hallows, young Grindelwald and Dumbledore see themselves as equal counterparts - or, even, brothers. They met and instantly clicked, sharing one

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<sup>12</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 406-10.

another's obsession with finding the Deathly Hallows, which would have made them not only the Masters of Death, but also the masters of the Wizarding world.<sup>13</sup> They passionately shared their pro-Wizard ideas back and forth between one another, admiring their cleverness and accepting each other's anti-Muggle speech.<sup>14</sup> The Tale of the Three Brothers symbolized, to Dumbledore and Grindelwald, what a pro-Wizard world could be and united them to desire this nationalistic end.

### Long-Term Denial

Another fascist figure from the pre-war era is Charles Péguy. However, this title is somewhat controversial. According to David Carroll in *French Literary Fascism*, “no one seemed a less likely candidate than Péguy for the ‘honor’ of having been considered by French Fascists one of the ‘founding fathers of fascism.’”<sup>15</sup> As a socialist, republican, Dreyfusard, and opposer of anti-Semitism, Péguy, on the surface, lacked every quality that most fascists valued.<sup>16</sup> Despite this, Péguy's influence on French fascism is substantial. He maintained “purification” of the race and speaks of “spiritual rather than a biological purity” for the French people.<sup>17</sup> He also had a distinct Christian-versus-Jewish mentality.<sup>18</sup> This mentality plays into the us-versus-them mentality that plagues all fascism.

Another factor of Péguy's fascism is his description of the “harmonious city.”<sup>19</sup> In this description, he describes a place where all people are considered “conforming” citizens of the

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<sup>13</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 714.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 356-7.

<sup>15</sup> Carroll, *French Literary Fascism*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 48.

city with no “men who are foreigners.”<sup>20</sup> The city is ruled by the powerful majority and thus, everyone peacefully obeys these rulers with their best interest in mind.<sup>21</sup>

Interestingly enough, Albus Dumbledore resembles Péguy in his candidacy, or lack thereof, for fascist founder. As the man who defeated Grindelwald in 1945 and a prominent figure in opposition to Voldemort, it would seem as though Dumbledore opposed fascism altogether. This is known to be not true, but for years it seemed so. In his published letter to Grindelwald, Dumbledore, too, had a us-versus-them mentality between the Wizards and the Muggles. He claims that Wizard dominance over the Muggles would exist “for the Muggles’ own good” and for the “greater good” of the world.<sup>22</sup> These pro-Wizard sentiments would create a society similar to Péguy’s harmonious city, in which Wizards had certain rights over Muggles, including the right to rule, and Muggles peacefully obey for their own good.

On a larger scale, Dumbledore’s secret fascism can be found in the French *Thèse Immunitaire*, or “Immunity Thesis.” This is the school of thought that says that France, as a nation, is immune to fascism.<sup>23</sup> It came about primarily in the decades that followed World War II from French historians. The explanation for fascism in France visibly present in the interwar period is explained by historians as a “foreign” and “alien” concept, which was imposed upon them, and while present, is at best “marginal,” in the society of the time.<sup>24</sup> Further, historians claim that French fascism lacked “certain essential or typical features of fascism such as social radicalism, incipient totalitarianism, or aggressive expansionism.”<sup>25</sup> Obviously, many historians

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 48-51.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 357.

<sup>23</sup> Brian Jenkins, *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right*, (New York, Berghahn Books, 2005), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Jenkins, *France in the Era*, 2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 4.

have since sought to challenge this thesis on the grounds of the true existence of native French fascism.

As mentioned, this is reflected in Dumbledore's fascist history. For years, Dumbledore actively opposed fascism. It is clear from his history with Grindelwald, however, that this opposition was not always true. Dumbledore was clearly pro-Wizard, anti-Muggle in his youth. Although one could argue that these sentiments were imparted onto him by Grindelwald in the same way that one could argue for the immunity thesis for France's fascism, it is evident that at their roots, both France and Dumbledore truly held their own, self-made fascist beliefs.

### **An Analysis of German Fascism in Relation to Gellert Grindelwald**

Grindelwald embodied Nazi fascism in its goals and its justifications. He sought a world in which Wizards lived free from Muggles, just as the Nazis wanted to be free from the Jews and others they considered inferior. Neither directly said they wished to slaughter millions of people, instead used language of freedom and power to persuade their followers to support their goals. From the similarities in rhetorical strategies, it seems the real-world Nazi history influenced J.K. Rowling's writing.

Certain language and ideas used by both Grindelwald and the National Socialist Party can be compared side by side to showcase their near exactness:

“It is said that I hate Les Non-Magiques. The Muggles. The No-Maj. The Can't-Spells . . . I do not hate them. I do not . . . For I do not fight out of hatred. I say the Muggles are not lesser, but other. Not worthless, but of other value. Not disposable, but of a different disposition.”<sup>26</sup>

“People are always saying that our National Socialist racial thinking is materialistic, unchristian, chauvinistic, imperialistic, and that it leads to the

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<sup>26</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts: The Crimes of Grindelwald*, (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2018), 245-6.

defamation of foreign races and peoples. The opposite is the case. We believe our racial policy is the surest guarantee for mutual respect and for peaceful coexistence between the peoples of this world. Someone of another race is different from me both in body and soul, for both are important. This makes no value judgement about other races.”<sup>27</sup>

Grindelwald gave this speech in front of an arena of supporters near the beginning of his rise to power. Similarly, the Nazi words come from Gerhard Wagner, head of the National Socialist German Physicians’ Association, in 1936. Both intended to gain supporters for their racial policies. At the times these speeches were given, Hitler was leader of the National Socialist Party and Grindelwald was developing a following across Europe as a revolutionary.

At points in their speeches, both men make a claim regarding the way they look to others. They directly address concerns that those listening might have; they show they are listening and they care. In doing so, they give themselves an opportunity to create a defense against a vague, absent attacker. Naturally, they deny their racism. Grindelwald insists he does not hate Muggles. Wagner claims to want peaceful coexistence. After this brief shield against criticism, they launch into actively promoting the softest versions of their plans.

This is how it all began, with professed restraint designed to make radical ideas appear less objectionable. Meanwhile, concentrations camps were already in operation and Grindelwald was a well-known danger in Europe.<sup>28</sup> Later on, when their positions of power were cemented, these fascists could express even more outrageous ideas openly.

According to Albus Dumbledore, Grindelwald wanted three things since his youth: power, Muggle torture, and the Deathly Hallows.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Nazis wanted to seize power, to

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<sup>27</sup> Gerhard Wagner, “Race and Population Policy,” in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 71.

<sup>28</sup> J.K. Rowling, *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (New York, Arthur A. Levine Books, 2016), 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 717.



end races they considered inferior, and to attain mystical status. With these goals in mind, both Grindelwald and the Nazis set out on paths that would span decades, only to end in failure.

Starting relatively tame prevented the majority of the population from rejecting them outright. Once followers had accepted the premises, the leaders became bolder. Dumbledore told Harry that Grindelwald dreamed of torturing Muggles since his youth.<sup>30</sup> Even as a young man, Grindelwald professed a desire to dominate Muggles using force.<sup>31</sup> However, he softens his language while trying to gain supporters, insisting that he only wishes to defend the Wizarding world from its attackers. “It is not we who are violent,” Grindelwald claims, a statement which both paints his opponents as the villains and himself as the hero.<sup>32</sup>

In order to promote atrocities, fascists must find justifications. In *Selling Hitler*, Nicholas O’Shaughnessy describes what he calls the propaganda trilogy: mythologies, symbolism, and rhetoric. All of these are used by Grindelwald and his followers as well.

### Mythologies

O’Shaughnessy describes a myth as a narrative that both represents and affects a culture.<sup>33</sup> The Nazis used several such myths to shape the public mindset and to create enemies. These nationalistic narratives stemmed from traditional and folkloric sources, capitalizing on familiar and comforting stories, while drawing parallels between real-world events. While Nazis reappropriated tales such as *Das Nibelungenlied*, a classic German epic, to portray themselves as

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 357.

<sup>32</sup> Rowling, *Crimes of Grindelwald*, 254.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas O’Shaughnessy, *Selling Hitler: Propaganda and the Nazi Brand* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016), 140.

the heroic Siegfried and the Jews, Bolsheviks, Slavs, and other “Untermenschen”<sup>34</sup> as the hero’s murderers, Grindelwald similarly became attached to *The Tale of the Three Brothers*.

Grindelwald imagines himself as a mighty figure of this Wizarding folktale. He is one of the few who believes that a person could actually collect the Deathly Hallows - the Elder Wand, the Resurrection Stone, and the Invisibility Cloak - and therefore, become the Master of Death. He does not, however, share this goal publicly with anyone other than his good friend Albus Dumbledore. Though Grindelwald’s desire to become Master of Death encourages his desire for power, the only Deathly Hallow he finds is the Elder Wand.

Few knew about Grindelwald’s quest for the Deathly Hallows; even Hermione Granger, after extensive research, never came across any reference to it.<sup>35</sup> When one considers Grindelwald as a singular person, the comparison lacks execution; however, if Grindelwald embodies the entire idea of fascism, it is clear this myth created and encouraged his attitudes towards himself, his goals, and his enemies, just as classic German tales promoted the idea of the “true German.”

### Symbolism

The Nazis’s success in manipulating the second element of propaganda - symbolism - is obvious. Even today, decades later, the sight of the swastika creates a strong, visceral reaction in people around the world. Its significance as a Nazi symbol is dominant over its other meanings. This directly corresponds to the Harry Potter series’ Deathly Hallows symbol, a circle within a triangle bisected by a line, each shape representing one of the three Deathly Hallows. When

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<sup>34</sup> *Untermenschen* is a term used by the Nazis to refer to all types of people they considered lower than themselves. Literally, Untermenschen means “under-people.”

<sup>35</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 317.

Viktor Krum sees Xenophilius Lovegood casually wearing the symbol, his reaction is immediate and severe. “This is Grindelwald’s [*sic*] sign,” he insists angrily.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, Lovegood considers the symbol only for its mythological meaning.

The ability of these symbols to be reinterpreted is what made them so powerful. Despite each symbol’s original, mythological meaning, “its end use is how it is perceived.”<sup>37</sup> While Steven Heller argues the swastika can never recover from its Nazi associates, the Deathly Hallows symbol may not have the same fate. To the main characters of the Harry Potter series - Harry, Ron, Hermione, Dumbledore, and Voldemort - the symbol remains associated with Grindelwald, but its meaning refers to the *Tale of the Three Brothers*. To Viktor Krum, however, and the thousands of other Wizards directly affected by Grindelwald’s violence and terror, it will never be more than Grindelwald’s mark, representing his violence and fascist ideals.

Symbols have the benefit of acting as a kind of shorthand, a quick trigger that demands an emotional response.<sup>38</sup> Both the swastika and the Deathly Hallows symbol are simple shapes, images children could draw. With a few strokes of the pen (or wand), an entire message can be represented. Previously, the swastika and variations thereof were used across the Eurasian continent for a variety of reasons. It has been connected to India, China, Greece, and all over the world. When the swastika became prominent in Germany, it was presented as a racial Aryan symbol by mystics and occultists, then reappropriated once more by the Nazis.<sup>39</sup> When the symbol became associated with the Nazi Party, its previous meanings were more or less erased, leaving only the new, lasting reference to a fascist regime.

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<sup>36</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 148.

<sup>37</sup> Steven Heller, *The Swastika: Symbol Beyond Redemption?* (New York: Allworth Press, 2000), 10.

<sup>38</sup> O’Shaughnessy, 215-6.

<sup>39</sup> Heller, 41-2.

Meanwhile, the Deathly Hallows symbol was nothing more than a representation of a quest for mythical objects for centuries, beginning with the Peverell brothers, allegedly the characters in the *Tale of the Three Brothers*.<sup>40</sup> Grindelwald recognized this meaning, but presented it as his own symbol, going so far as to carve it into the wall of Durmstrang, his old school.<sup>41</sup> Like the swastika, it kept its old significance to some, but across Europe, the symbol of the Deathly Hallows only meaning was of racial bigotry and violence.

### Rhetoric

“The Third Reich was about abuse of rhetoric, and to a lesser degree the use of rhetoric,” writes O’Shaughnessy.<sup>42</sup> Rhetoric is persuasion and rhetoric is language. Rhetoric is using the mechanics of language to plant ideas in the heads of others. The Nazis were experts at using propaganda, mythology, symbolism, and rhetoric to achieve power, and one can see Grindelwald using the same tactics in the Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts series as he attracts followers.

“If propaganda is to succeed, it must know what it wants. It must keep a clear and firm goal in mind, and seek the appropriate means and methods to reach that goal,” said Joseph Goebbels, Nazi Minister of Propaganda, in 1934.<sup>43</sup> He openly reveals the mindset of an entire movement, admitting the Nazis were calculating in the language they used. The use of metaphor, hyperbole, euphemism, and other linguistic tools was conscious and always in support of a singular goal: racial superiority.

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<sup>40</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 413.

<sup>41</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 148.

<sup>42</sup> O’Shaughnessy, 255.

<sup>43</sup> Joseph Goebbels, “Propaganda and Public Enlightenment as Prerequisites for Practical Work in Many Areas,” in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 43.

In rhetoric, “words are never neutral; they are association-rich” writes O’Shaughnessy.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the speaker can both instruct the listener what to believe and can appeal to the associations they already have. When Hitler gathered supporters, he connected to beliefs they already held. “Germany had fallen from its former heights, and at home it was torn apart,” he said in 1925, addressing the status of Germany after the First World War.<sup>45</sup> He found a target for these opinions by pointing to the bourgeois establishment and the German masses. While he called the bourgeois “tyrants” and “foreigners” who wanted domination over the true German people, Hitler insisted they lacked the strength, will, and ability to attack.<sup>46</sup> This encouraged his listeners to view themselves as the oppressed working class, united in their victimization. Many people already had this idea in their minds, but Hitler gave it a voice and gave them an outlet.

Grindelwald did the same for Wizards when he spoke before a crowd in Paris. He told the Wizards they were oppressed by the magical governments. He addresses the feelings they already have, by saying “You came today because of a craving and a knowledge that the old ways serve us no longer.”<sup>47</sup> He tells them they have the strength to overthrow the establishment: “Magic blooms only in rare souls. It is granted to those who live for higher things. Oh, and what a world we could make, for all of humanity.”<sup>48</sup> This speech convinces Queenie, a major character who wishes to marry a Muggle despite laws forbidding Wizard-Muggle relationships. Knowing Grindelwald wanted distance between Wizards and Muggles, it seems odd that she would go

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<sup>44</sup> O’Shaughnessy, 256.

<sup>45</sup> Adolf Hitler, “Reestablishing the National Socialist German Workers Party,” in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008). 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Rowling, *Crimes of Grindelwald*, 245.

<sup>48</sup> Rowling, *Crimes of Grindelwald*, 246.

with him. However, the language he used did as it was intended; he connected to the thoughts and fears she already had towards the Wizarding establishment and gave her a different path.

Fear was the driving force in both men's rhetorical strategies. Grindelwald instills fear in his followers of what would happen if they do not do as he says: he shows them a potential future, one of World War II, in which Muggles kill each other with guns and bombs and asks "How long will it take before they turn their weapons on us?"<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Hitler defended Nazi military actions by claiming to act defensively: "We therefore had no choice but to put on the helmet and follow the path that would free not only the German Reich, but all of Europe, from the dangers that threatened."<sup>50</sup> In creating a scapegoat, Hitler and Grindelwald directed the frustrations their followers already felt towards their own goals.

### Fascism, Institutions, and Individuals

From *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, readers learn that Grindelwald was the most dangerous dark Wizard of all time, until Voldemort brought the same ideas to new heights in the 1990s.<sup>51</sup> This book describes Grindelwald's personal ideological development. It does not, however, explain how this young man went from being expelled from school to killing people across Europe. The *Fantastic Beasts* film series gives more insight into his rise, but the second film ends as he only begins to gain power. As of *Fantastic Beasts: Crimes of Grindelwald*, he has no institutional power, but rather a gathering of supporters sent out to share his message with the world.

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<sup>49</sup> Rowling, *Crimes of Grindelwald*, 250-1.

<sup>50</sup> Adolf Hitler, "Speech To the Old Guard in Munich," in *Landmark Speeches of National Socialism*, ed. Randall L. Bytwerk (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 97.

The danger he refers to, as he goes on to explain, is "the international Jew."

<sup>51</sup> Rowling, *Deathly Hallows*, 555.

Because the Nazis controlled the institutions in Germany, they were able to disseminate propaganda systematically. As of the second *Fantastic Beasts* film, Grindelwald remains the target of a manhunt. Though he has many followers, he has no formal position of power which would allow a propaganda structure to put in place methods like the Nazis used. Harry Potter fans must wait until the next film in the series to discover whether Grindelwald's path continues to follow that of the Nazis or if it diverges.

### **Conclusion**

Knowing that real life and fiction influence each other, we must not overlook the role fascism plays in one of the most popular book and film series of all time. Children, growing up reading and watching Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts, learn to associate fascist language with villains. This is a wise lesson for J.K. Rowling to teach. In the Harry Potter series, the story of Grindelwald, Dumbledore, and the Wizarding world's fascist epidemic from the 1920 to 1940s was nearly forgotten in the decades that followed. Voldemort picked up this sentiment and threatened the peace of the Wizarding world fifty years after Grindelwald did. Over the past several years, a new discussion on fascism has arisen, as a new generation of nationalists begin to speak up.

Humans must learn from history. In the Harry Potter and Fantastic Beasts franchises, the characters learn to stand up against fascists and to accept that Wizards should not tyrannize Muggles. Since the lessons we learn from literature are important to human development, the fact that the protagonists fight Grindelwald and Voldemort sends a message to young readers everywhere that they too have the ability to stand up for what is right. As long as fascists remain

the villains in our literature, they will be the villains in our minds, and thus we will be more able to recognize modern villains in our society.



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